



**STAGING “AMERICANIZATION”**  
**“America” on Stage: Theater and National Identity, 1671-1867**

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Despite the integration of New Historicism and Performance Studies into the theater history methodology, a grand narrative of repression and exclusion, both romanticizing what it means to be “American” and promulgating myths of unified national identity (similar to those suggested by Crèvecoeur in 1782), still pervades examinations of American theater. We begin our survey, however, with two fundamental presumptions. First, terms like “identity” and “nationhood” are inherently problematic because establishing prevailing notions of both requires contrast with “Other” (usually racialized non-white, non-European). Second, any labeling of what is “American” demands a view of what Richard Schechner identifies as “a double negative, the ‘not...not’” [Schechner: 92-3]<sup>1</sup> because self-identification is crucial in assessing both what is American and what constitutes American theater. In the end, then, we focus not on sedimented binaries, but on fluid patterns of ideological, racial, cultural, and economic constructs across two centuries of the budding American theater.<sup>2</sup> Given this, our aim is to utilize repeated “tropes of Americanness” to track the slippery slope of Crèvecoeurian Americanization<sup>3</sup> within dramatic literature from 1671-1867. Our argument acknowledges that American theater from its outset was imitative and recognizes the familiar stable of “American”

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<sup>1</sup> For example, that is not American but it is also not...not American.

<sup>2</sup> We prefer “United States” unless Canadian and South American theaters are addressed; and we prefer “Performance history” as the phrase includes the examination of actors, directors, managers, designers, etc. in addition to text. For the purpose of this article, however, we employ essentialized notions of each.

<sup>3</sup> Crèvecoeur’s trope of the industry and ingenuity of the individual appears time and again when considering cultural nationalism in the American Theater: “He (sic) looks around and sees many a prosperous person, who but a few years before was as poor as himself. This encourages him much, he begins to form some little scheme [...]. If he is wise he thus spends two or three years, in which time he acquires knowledge, the use of tools, the modes of working the lands, felling trees, etc. This prepares the foundation of a good name, the most useful acquisition he can make. [...] He purchases some land [...] His good name procures him credit. [...] He is become a freeholder[...] He is naturalized, his name is enrolled with those of the other citizens of the province and [...] for the first time in his life he counts for something” [Crèvecoeur: 59-60].

characters as reflections of the political, social, and commercial influence of a burgeoning nation. In doing so, we point to ways in which these stage characters were implicated in the sustained evolution of a Foucaultian structure of power, which concomitantly drew from and shaped prevailing nationalistic markers of “American” identity.

At the heart of cultural encounter(s) between European settlers and 17<sup>th</sup> century “America” laid expectations of the “New World”. Rag tag “British American” immigrants clung to familiar customs and religious beliefs that affected their attitudes toward the theater, carrying with them not only the memory of European theater—at least their *imagining* of it—but their prejudices against it as well.<sup>4</sup> Theater of the Americas stands in marked contrast to the sophisticated form displayed in European cities, pointing conspicuously to a theory of evolution with regard to its development. The ghosting or [re]imagining of European theater remained with the colonists/izers until the efficacy of theatrical representation was recognized with mid-18<sup>th</sup> century “Dialogues” and “Odes”. Educated young men sought the acquisition of practical skills like rhetoric, oratory and elocution. Thus, the Dialogue—or the “school drama”—emerged at colleges across the colonies.<sup>5</sup> These Dialogues, emerging seemingly late in the country’s development,<sup>6</sup> precipitate two thematic strains that run the course of United States dramatic literature—the political and the mercantile. It is in these Dialogues, too, that the ubiquitous character of the “Indian” emerges in New World dramas.<sup>7</sup>

Seventeenth-century Dialogues sometimes concerned themselves with proselytizing to the Indians. Although not intended to be performed, the most famous of these is John Eliot’s *Indian Dialogues* (1671) in which colonial anxieties about self and “Other” are reflected. Patricia Caldwell describes underlying tensions in this Christian training manual of sorts as casting “light not only on New England’s failure to convert the native people but also on the colony’s inner struggle with the meaning of its own

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<sup>4</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> century Brits and French experienced a decidedly different breed of theater in Restoration England (once the repression of the Interregnum eased) and in Paris with performances of the works of Corneille, Molière, and Racine (Cardinal Richelieu notwithstanding)—and in Italy with *Commedia del Arte* and opera.

<sup>5</sup> Prior to these imitations, yet nonetheless indigenous pieces, young men at university performed such English classics as *Cato* and *Tamburlane*.

<sup>6</sup> This “late blooming” of American theater is due to multiple factors. Religious practice (Puritan, Quaker, etc.) in the colonies and its attendant anti-theatrical prejudice is often pointed to as the exclusive cause. We posit, rather, with Peter A. Davis, “Plays and Playwrights to 1800,” *The Cambridge History of American Theater* (Vol. 1. Eds. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1998) that colonial mercantile interests contributed to the creation of bans on theater among the Colonies. Davis astutely comments on the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century name changes of two theatrical companies to include “American” in their titles, as the cachet of goods imported from Britain lost its luster when colonists challenged unreasonable taxation and determined that the equivalent of “buy American” was more financially efficacious. Also, commonly held images of the “Other”—romanticized in form and content—were imported from Europe, and the ghosting to which we alluded was commonplace. For example, the earliest Native characters to grace the American stage were created by Restoration playwrights William Davenant, John Dryden, Robert Howard and Aphra Behn, not by colonial settlers with first-hand encounters.

<sup>7</sup> The 18<sup>th</sup>-century encyclopaedic delineation of categories from the traditional character types (Yankee, Indian, Negro, Frontiersman, etc.) to well-established forms and genres (melodrama, Well-Made Play, tragedy, comedy, etc.) has been perpetuated across modernity well into the post-modern era of our own lived experience.

existence in the New World" [Caldwell: 294-5]. She describes the piece as "inner dialogue", pointing toward it as

An expression of the New England mind grappling with itself...as it hovers between the fearsome attractiveness of Amerindian civilization and the exigencies of life in the New World, and the fading reality of its European home [295].

Interestingly, Eliot's dialogue included King Philip (Metcomet) as one of its principle characters, four years before King Philip's War.<sup>8</sup> Recast as *Metamora* over 150 years later in a play by the same name, Philip epitomizes the aforementioned colonial identity conflict.

Odes, such as Francis Hopkinson's "An Exercise Containing a Dialogue and Ode: On the Accession of His present gracious Majesty George III", (1762) reflected loyalty to the crown.<sup>9</sup> With impending revolution, tone changed. Political satire emerged in the work of Robert Munford,<sup>10</sup> and "school dramas" became published polemical portraits of the conflict. Especially noted are those of Massachusetts "patriot" Mercy Otis Warren. *The Group*, Warren's most famous work, satirizes the colony's governor and his cronies. During the Revolution, though there was a ban on public theatrical "entertainments", Dialogues were written, and, at military base camps, theater flourished.<sup>11</sup> Across the war years it is divisiveness that indicates what it means to be "American" —or not. Even Crèvecoeur, on whose shoulders the essays in this volume stand, moves from pastoral adulation and praise of settlers' industry to distress over the economic, political, and cultural consequences of inevitable revolution.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the post-Revolutionary piece "A Little Teatable Chitchat" by John Smith (1781) turns to economic affairs in the Colonies for its subject matter, focusing on the value of the dollar post-Revolution.

A 1779 Dartmouth Dialogue illustrates the continued wartime ambivalence of British Americans toward Native peoples. John Smith's two-character "A Dialogue Between an Englishman and an Indian" accords the

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<sup>8</sup> The culmination of on-going conflicts over the purchase of Wampanoag land by the Plymouth Colony, in 1675 a bloody war broke between Natives (led by Metacom, called Philip by the colonists) and colonists, beginning in the town of Swansea and spreading throughout New England. Colonial victory forever changed the face of Native life as many were sold as slaves abroad or into local servitude, as the usurpation of Native lands continued.

<sup>9</sup> "For George shall gain immortal Praise;/ And Britain! George is thine" [*Dramas From the American Theater*: 6].

<sup>10</sup> As Moody notes, *The Candidates* (1770) "represents the transitional step from commencement dialogues to a more conventional play form" [11]. The play is wed to the Dialogue and pre-Revolutionary pamphleteering; however there is no record of its ever having been performed. Drawn from Munford's personal experience as a Virginia gentleman-farmer, soldier, and as a legislator, the piece (a comedy) depicts the sundry ways in which candidates appeal to potential constituents, seeking their votes—whispering campaigns, bribery, glad-handing, etc. Characters derive their names from the Restoration/18<sup>th</sup> century English use of epithets and include Mr. Wou'dbe, Mr. Smallhopes, and Mr. Worthy. Mr. Wou'dbe's servant, Ralpho, is perhaps the first Black character written by a White resident of what would become the United States and foreshadows Zeke in *The Contrast*.

<sup>11</sup> See Brown.

<sup>12</sup> Crèvecoeur establishes the characteristics prized by the "early American"—industry, freedom, and, again, as Peter A. Davis emphasizes, mercantilism, even for the farmer. The colonists literally and figuratively planted the seed from which American democracy and capitalism sprouted, producing a lifestyle that would entice mass immigration to the United States.

Amerindian more grace and manners than his British American counterpart. Yannhoontough has taken an English first name and is enrolled in college as the Englishman's classmate.<sup>13</sup> The Englishman propounds the construct of "Indian" as "barbarous", "cruel" and fond of massacres—an image well-mythologized by 1779. The Indian confronts the faulty logic of his Englishman peer who concludes, "Perhaps I have been too much prejudiced against the Indians" [Smith: 8]. Interestingly, just fifteen years earlier, *The Paxton Boys* (1764), derived from a true incident,<sup>14</sup> was a "farce filler for a theater evening" [Jones: 11]. This binary view of the Amerindian—comic buffoon *versus* Noble Savage—dominated both 18<sup>th</sup>-century lived experience and the stage.<sup>15</sup> Neither construct had much to do with the lives of Native peoples, however, who from their first encounters with Europeans were cheated and deprived of their land.

The dawning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw more systematic encroachment on Native peoples and the intensification of onstage stereotyping and essentializing of character, both reaching a zenith with John Augustus Stone's *Metamora: Or, the Last of the Wampanoags* (1829) and Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Bill (1830).<sup>16</sup> Indeed, "Indian plays," regardless of genre, most often dramatized (burlesqued or romanticized) cultural moments as in Mordecai Manuel Noah's comedy *She Would be a Soldier: or, The Plains of Chippewa* (1819), the War of 1812.<sup>17</sup>

Edwin Forrest's portrayal of *Metamora* is legendary as is the play's marking as the tragedy of an "aboriginal of this country". Stone's *Metamora* (1829) is the quintessential "last Indian" play—one in a long line of romantic depictions of the demise of a chief as White colonizers encroach on his homeland, his tribe, and his family. Prototypically, the protagonist stands his ground, is at one with his land, speaks in eloquent if not elevated language, chooses death over captivity or removal, befriends some White character(s) whom he protects from harm, but is ultimately marred by his very being—heathen, savage. Perhaps these plays salved the conscience of American audience who on one hand espoused the virtues of industry,

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<sup>13</sup> By this point, the enrollment of Native peoples at New England colleges was not uncommon, and Dartmouth, in particular, was known for its scholarships for Native students. These still exist today.

<sup>14</sup> (December 1763-January 1764) in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania a group of Scottish/Irish young men attacked settlements of Conestoga and Moravian Indians, then marched on the state capital where the second group was held in protective custody. Both tribes were peaceful; having previously led relatively uninterrupted lives, they did not take part in Pontiac's Rebellion. This vicious ambush of them exemplifies the already rampant view of the Indian as "savage" and "murderous", and speaks to the "Othering" that emanates from fear of the unknown and leads to unjust acts of violence.

<sup>15</sup> The notion of the Noble Savage was conceived long before, and its archetypal usage was widespread. Jones places its first onstage appearance in John Dryden's *The Conquest of Granada* (1670) [22]. In fact, so incessant was the notion of the Noble Savage that references appeared as a song sung by Maria in Royall Tyler's *The Contrast* (1787): "Alknomook: The Death Song of the Cherokee Indians."

<sup>16</sup> Full-length plays penned in the years between *The Paxton Boys* and *Metamora* include Robert Roger's *Ponteach: or, The Savages of America* (1766, never produced and with a more sympathetic view of the Indian); various versions of *Robinson Crusoe*, James Nelson Barker's *The Indian Princess: Or, La Belle Sauvage* (1808), followed by assorted treatments of the Pocahontas legend. For a more complete list, see Jones or Meserve.

<sup>17</sup> During the War of 1812 tribes switched allegiances as vying factions sought the support of the Indian nations in the fight between America and her progenitor.

freedom, and worship, but on the other deprived their Native counterparts of the same and overwhelmingly approved legislation that promoted the infamous Trail of Tears. *Metamora* clearly exhibits the tensions between colonizer and Native exacerbated by western expansion, as Stone paints a protagonist whose positive attributes far outweigh those of his combatants. The play's melodramatic conventions<sup>18</sup> combine with elements of Romanticism<sup>19</sup> and markers of classic tragedy to provoke in the audience the requisite pity and fear essential to the cathartic experience. How, then, could *Metamora's* audience not experience *anagnorisis* themselves?

Premiering nearly five years after *Letters from an American Farmer* was printed and released, Royall Tyler's *The Contrast* (1787) is predicated upon an array of socio-cultural binaries drawn from post-colonial daily lived experiences—primarily the tensions between Old World dependency and New World patriotism.<sup>20</sup>

One way in which Tyler distanced both himself and his play from loathed British culture was through his nationalization of English Restoration stock characters.<sup>21</sup> Colonel Manly is the über-patriotic war veteran, the model of untried Federalist virtues; Maria Van Rough, daughter of a hard-working merchant, his natural compliment. Both embody Crèvecoeur's agrarian republican ideal. On the other hand, the foppish Dimple and his servant Jessamy speak in French phrases, relishing their ability to illustrate the "contrast between a gentleman who had read Chesterfield and received the polish of Europe, and an unpolished, untraveled American" [Tyler: 50]. Manly's younger sister, Charlotte, and her confidante Letitia, coy libertines, join Dimple and Jessamy in flaunting European affectation and artificiality. Most pertinent to nationalization is Tyler's "true born Yankee American son of liberty" [38], Jonathan.

Jonathan, the Stage Yankee "waiter",<sup>22</sup> replicates the essential qualities of the self-sufficient, commonsensical New England manners and customs discussed by Crèvecoeur. He speaks in a distinctive dialect derived from his agriculturalist environment, possesses a simple wit, often sings verses of "Yankee Doodle", and otherwise mirrors a Puritan worldview. As the (albeit comically exaggerated) personification of "American" values, his homespun ingenuity is superior to the affectations of city-dwellers. This naively optimistic Stage Yankee delighted spectators who saw in his better qualities traits they believed were national, while remaining inclined to laugh at his

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<sup>18</sup> These include mistaken identity, strong curtains, clear cut contrasts between good and evil, and so forth.

<sup>19</sup> Exoticism of place, vast outdoor landscapes, swelling musical accompaniment, and heroism of the highest order.

<sup>20</sup> Staged just as ideals of the Articles of Confederation (1781) were slowly transforming into those of the Constitution (1788), it is interesting to note that "What is American?" is often defined by what "American" is not.

<sup>21</sup> To suggest that *The Contrast* is beholden to the five-act structure of Restoration comedy complete with its contrived plot and adherence to the unities of time, place, and action is nothing new. However, in terms of both Americanization and post-war dramatic literature we suggest that the overall structure of *The Contrast* embodied broader daily lived social binaries as citizens struggled for post-colonial national identity.

<sup>22</sup> In conversation with Jessamy, Jonathan makes sure to point out he is not Colonel Manly's servant: "Sir, do you take me for a neger—I am Colonel Manly's waiter" (32).

uncouthness on stage [Quinn: 294].<sup>23</sup> Other examples include Humphry Cubb in *The Politician Outwitted* (1788), who concerns himself with “the Constitution that you read in the newspaper about” [Low: 399]<sup>24</sup>; the “very honest fellow” Nathan Yank who appears nearly twenty years later in *Tears and Smiles* (1807) [Barker: 157]<sup>25</sup>; and the two Yankees in *Love and Friendship, or Yankee Notions* (1809)—Jonathan and the nautical Jack Hardweather.<sup>26</sup> While not all of these characters took the Jonathan moniker, they remained patriotic, frank, and skeptical of both foreign airs and urbanites — the quintessence of post-colonial Americanization.<sup>27</sup> It is, however, not until after the Treaty of Ghent with Jonathan Peabody in *The Bucktails; or, Americans in England* (1815)<sup>28</sup> that Yankee Theater mirrors a surge of anti-British sentiments resembling those in *The Contrast*.

Set in Bath, J.K. Paulding’s comedy offers a lesson in history, government, and valor through scathing juxtapositions of American manners with British credulity and prejudice. Paulding most visibly achieves this in the naming of his characters. The American visitors are given “solid” Anglo names—Henry, Frank, Jane, and Jonathan—while all British names point to faults—Lord Noland, Admiral Gunwale, the fashion-conscious Threadneedle, and the Obsolete family whose antiquarian patriarch avoids anything to do with the New World.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the “Yankee Doodle” whistling Jonathan is pitted against lower class Europeans, like the Irishman Paddy Whack, only to emerge both intellectually and socially superior. Eventually, Paulding’s satiric attacks on British values point to America as a better nation inhabited with exceptional citizens. *The Yankey in England* (1815) is akin to *The Bucktails* in its pointed satire, overall structure, and nationalistic themes.<sup>30</sup>

As Jeffersonian Democracy dissolved into Jacksonian Manifest Destiny, the use of New England rural manners, situations, and customs as

<sup>23</sup> Also refer to Hodge.

<sup>24</sup> Low: 399. Set in New York City in 1788, this closet drama is almost identical to *The Contrast* in its structure, characters, and love story content. Humphry, a naïve farmer who speaks in proverbs, is superior not only to the Negro servant Cuffy and the French barber Toupee but also the elite European affectations of Worthnought and Old Loveyet.

<sup>25</sup> First produced 4 March 1807 in Philadelphia (also the setting), the play wrangles with “hypercritics of our own, who, perhaps from being placed too near the scene, cannot discover the beauties of their own county” [141].

<sup>26</sup> Set in Charleston SC, Jonathan is the most important Yankee in the story, which closely resembles *The Contrast* in plot, structure, and character types. Of note is the way in which Yankee dialect has matured since Tyler’s drama.

<sup>27</sup> These dramas maintain the prevailing five act structure and continue to utilize nationalized character types drawn from Tyler’s drama. Plots are similar to each other and obviously influenced by *The Contrast* as well, with non-alliances between European fops and American citizens marking broader cultural and political differences.

<sup>28</sup> It seems, too, that Paulding’s Yankee play was responding to English travel publications that were propagating a negative view of the New World and its inhabitants.

<sup>29</sup> So clueless are they about the New World that when the “Aboriginals” arrive Mrs. Obsolete remarks in astonishment, “Why, as I live, they are dressed, and look like absolute Christians!” [91].

<sup>30</sup> Featuring the Yankee Doolittle, the maturity of the Yankee dialect and the inclusion of a glossary of terms with the printed version make it significant to Americanization on the post-war stage. If language is indeed the medium through which the dominant paradigm is constructed, maintained and perpetuated, then this attention to linguistic codes of “Americanization” through Yankee vernacular proves quite influential to staging national identity.

the stage icon of national unity reached its pinnacle with *The Forest Rose; or, American Farmers* (1825). Set in New Jersey, this two act pastoral opera, complete with love story and happy ending, offers an idealized view of country living, proclaiming “there is no lot on earth more enviable than that of AMERICAN FARMERS” [Woodworth: 173].<sup>31</sup> The honesty and shrewdness of merchant farmer Jonathan Ploughboy is set in steep contrast to the practiced inanity of the Englishman Bellamay. Most important, *The Forest Rose* foretells broader cultural issues of overlapping identity markers and anticipates shifting class definitions key to defining “American.”

Two decades later, Anna Mowatt’s *Fashion* (1845) speaks to “class tension just below the surface of antebellum America” and “mechanisms of control being deployed by the remnants of patriciate” [Mowatt: 80]. A Comedy of Manners, at face value underscoring the notion that United States drama lagged behind Europe by a century, the play elucidates societal conditions of its time. Pointing to some of the aforementioned binaries (City versus Country, Old World versus New, etc.), *Fashion* encapsulates America’s ideological struggle between the desire to reward a strong work ethic and individualism and a class system inherited from the Old World. This is further heightened by the ways in which the Stage Yankee of *The Contrast* had evolved into the Comic Frontiersman in *The Lion of the West* (1831), focusing on what eventually became recognized as Frederick Jackson Turner’s idealized construct of the frontier.<sup>32</sup>

The *nouveau riche* Francophile Mrs. Tiffany epitomizes the ridiculous social climber whose status derives from wealth. She prizes the superficial in contrast to Trueman (aptly named) and his granddaughter who exhibit the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century national fixation on the frontier, valuing honesty and practicality. Mowatt problematizes these constructs, raising *Fashion* from the level of purely imitative of British High Comedy or the natural consequence of dramatic evolution since *The Contrast*. She extended her metaphor to capitalize on outer fashion (clothing/style) as “the self-conscious construction of public image demanding respectability through the indication of material success” [Taylor: 49]. The “patriciate” had reason to fear usurpation of their positions by this rising class of self-made “ladies” and “gentlemen”. Mowatt cleverly allows her characters to self-identify and to name each other’s social constructs. Mr. Tiffany interrupts his wife’s line “All the women of fashion...” with his “In this land are self-constructed...”; Trueman exclaims, “You look as if you’d melted down your flesh into dollars, and mortgaged your soul in the bargain!”—marking Tiffany as a product of America’s fascination with capital gain and speed. Although a member of America’s established upper class herself, Mowatt and her husband were once in such debt that they lost their mansion to creditors. So,

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<sup>31</sup> Originally performed 6 October 1825 at Chatham Garden Theater, the show ran for the next forty years in places like Philadelphia, New Orleans, St. Louis, Chicago, and London further globalizing post-war Americanization.

<sup>32</sup> For Turner, the brusqueness and vigor of the “American character” owed much to the energy that comes with freedom to expand and explore boundaries and borders. J.K. Paulding’s *The Lion of the West* (1831) reflects this through its comic frontiersman Nimrod Wildfire. Like Jonathan he is unrefined in appearance and speaks candidly. He, too, is wary of European airs as embodied by the British tourist Mrs. Wollope. Unlike the Yankee, though, he sometimes drinks and gambles. Most distinctive are the frontiersman’s obvious physical prowess, proclivity for telling tall tales, knowledge of firearms, and position as Congressman.

the playwright's societal ambiguity and—due to her friendship with Henry Clay—her politics, allowed her to take as her comedic subject the tensions that lay at the heart of an America now operating on a two-party democratic system. Her audience, as was the case with Jonathan in *The Contrast*, identified with whichever character took their fancy. In the end, Mowatt did not reinscribe Old World class distinctions as has been suggested by other theater historians. Rather, by poking fun at all characters and their philosophies, she reinforced *choice* as a particularly American characteristic.

Neither Stage Yankee nor Frontiersman traits were altogether indicative of antebellum Americanization once Congress chose to ratify the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.<sup>33</sup> George Aiken's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) reflected this both in content and characterization. Like *The Contrast*, Aiken's play attended to deep-seated binaries of everyday American life: Blackness/Whiteness; Abolition/Slave Power; and Sinner/Saint. In fact, while the six-act melodrama addressed Free Soil Party<sup>34</sup> concerns using Christian social justice teachings, it concurrently reinscribed stereotypes of Black Africans as substandard, dutiful, and deferential to racial "superiors".<sup>35</sup> Consequently, the drama is as much about staging a "'new industrial morality' of hard work, temperance, and perseverance in the hope of achieving self-made success" [McConachie: 159] as it is about championing the rights of captive Black Africans.

Through his Stage Negro Hero Uncle Tom, Aiken addresses religious proclivities of northern urbanites that were hastily joining the abolitionist lobby. Epitomizing business-class moral conceits, Tom is slow to anger, refuses to give into temptation, does not drink, is measured in his response to perceived injustice, speaks often of how "[t]he Lord is good unto all that trust in him" [Aiken: 188], and is otherwise dedicated to a balanced Bible-based life. Unlike the comic "Happy Negro" of minstrelsy,<sup>36</sup> this pious Stage

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<sup>33</sup> Clashes between North and South concerning enslavement in new territories intensified after the Mexican-American War (1846-8). Because the Compromise of 1820 made it illegal for territory north of the 36°30' line to support slavery, Congress labored to preserve equilibrium between Free Soil Party and abolitionists interests with those of Slave Power, hoping to avoid the outbreak of war. Brokered by Senators Webster (MA), Clay (KY), Calhoun (SC), and Douglas (IL) as part of the omnibus Pearce Act, the Fugitive Slave bill did just that. Provisions required all "good citizens" to assist federal law enforcement in the capture and return of *suspected* fugitive slaves. Once in custody, the alleged escapee appeared before a Federal official; was denied due process rights; and "reclaimed" by a master's statement of ownership. Congressional ratification enraged most Northerners who, until this point, were largely indifferent to the plight of Black Africans. Interestingly, the bill was an extension of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793. Personal-liberty laws contradicting the 1850 law were soon passed, and the work of Quakers and Wesleyan Church members on behalf of the Underground Railroad intensified.

<sup>34</sup> The Free Soilers broke away from the Democratic Party in 1848. Their goal was to prevent expansion of Black enslavement into Western territories. Eventually they were absorbed by the Republican Party in 1854, named as such because the founding members wanted to revive tenets of Jeffersonian republicanism.

<sup>35</sup> Consult Hughes: 29-45 for a broader discussion of this assertion.

<sup>36</sup> The origins of minstrelsy are well-documented—the mythic legend of T.D. Rice's claim to have taken his "Jim Crow" dance from an unknown Black performer in 1828; Dan Emmet's creation of the Virginia Minstrels and the company's longevity; the layering of White performers "blackening up" and Black performers "corking up" in seeming economic retaliation; the stereotypical characters, the set structure, etc. In "American Theater in Context, from the Beginnings to 1870", McConachie emphasizes minstrelsy's trickster and Irish antecedents. Krasner further problematizes the mask of the blackened face. Similarly, Lott



Negro Hero is domesticated, sensible, and “square in everything” [Aiken: 185]. Moreover, in death Tom reveals that “authentic American identity” is achieved only through Christian reserve and hard work. Americanization, then, is seemingly linked to Black-White amalgamation *à la* Crèvecoeur via the Northern Protestant ethic.<sup>37</sup>

Dion Boucicault’s melodrama *The Octoroon; or, Life in Louisiana* (1859) presents surprising complications both in terms of cultural nationalism in theater and its expressions of antebellum United States nationhood as the play not only represents a variety of races and ethnicities but also established socio-cultural binaries. Directly addressing the slave-base of Southern economy, *The Octoroon* further problematizes national identity in its subtle reference to both the mestizo<sup>38</sup> and to borders—geographic and social. Deceptive in its opening that mirrors the pastoral “happy plantation” scenes of minstrelsy, the play forced its audience to acknowledge “national convergences through several liminal and composite characters” [Chiles, Abstract, 28].<sup>39</sup> “Othering” is displayed on multiple levels, in this case, as a distinct racial and economic pecking order, which is depicted not only through dialogue but also within the stage directions. For example, those who eat at table with plantation dwellers are differentiated from those prohibited; “Black” Irishman shares exclusion with octoroon, Amerindian, and slave. As a result, Boucicault presents “Life in Louisiana” with more complexity than he is often credited. Thus *The Octoroon*, frequently dismissed as merely melodrama, is significant for the unique ways in which it grapples with identity constructs, such as the parable of the Yankee hugging the Creole embedded in Scudder’s dialogue, the transfer of the tomahawk from Indian to Irishman, and the alliance between Wahnotee and the slave boy. The play premiered just four days after John Brown was hung, and in temperament “straddled the fence” between Northern abolitionist sentiments and Southern “gentility”.

Soon after the surrender of Fort Sumter to Confederate forces 14 April 1861, President Lincoln appeared as a character in Southern dramas such as *Ahab Lincoln: A Tragedy of the Potomac*. The play’s Lincoln is a spineless twit smuggled into office “by officious and misguided friends” [Miller: 7]. This courtroom drama, which is one continuous scene between Ahab Lincoln,

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remarks, “Where representation once problematically seemed to image forth its referent, we must now think of, say, the blackface mask as less a *repetition* of power relations and than *signifier* for them—a distorted mirror, reflecting displacements and condensations and discontinuities between which and the social field there exist lags, unevenness, multiple determinations” [8].

<sup>37</sup> Another telling example is when the “indolent heathen” Topsy is “made good” through Little Eva’s death, “When I’s gwine to do anything wicked, I tinks of her, and somehow I can’t do it. I’s getting to be good, dat’s a fact” [222].

<sup>38</sup> Chiles [28-54] goes beyond Roach’s interpretation of the play *vis-à-vis* “fancy lady” auctions of octoroons and miscegenation as a fact of plantation life to explore the relationship between the play and the acquisition of Mexican lands (and people) through the Treaty of Guadalupe in 1848—thus, increasing the play’s viability for an investigation of usurpation and Manifest Destiny not previously explored.

<sup>39</sup> She emphasizes two additional points that relate to the notion of “Americanization”: 1) Irish-born playwright Boucicault played the role of the Indian, Wahnotee, for the first two weeks of the play’s initial run, and 2) Boucicault created a “happy ending” for the London production, thus contrasting American audience reception with that of the “motherland.” In the U.S., particularly in the South with its state laws prohibiting interracial marriage, the only appropriate plot resolution was Zoe’s suicide.

Secretary of State Seward, Lt. General Winfield Scott, Jefferson Davis, Confederate VP Alexander Stephens, and Confederate General Beauregard, ends with the suicides of President Lincoln and General Scott. A propaganda (closet) drama, the obvious appeal is to Confederate nationalist ideals. Other dramas presenting President Lincoln as the icon of weak-willed "Northern Aggression" include *The Royal Ape* and *King Linkum the First*.<sup>40</sup> Two Copperhead<sup>41</sup> dramas, *The Irrepressible Conflict* and "The Administration Telegraph; or, How It Is Done", offer similar characterizations. In all cases, these are comic portrayals of a somewhat cowardly, boorish country rube altogether lost as commander-in-chief. Though superior to women and Blacks, the Yankee Goon is deferential to Southerners and frightened by the Confederate States. By 1863, he is a heavy drinker and womanizer only looking out for his interests as ruling monarch. Stimulated by early Southern victories and aversion to Lincoln's emancipation agenda, these five Yankee Goon dramas tell us much about how the Confederate States of America and its supporters disidentified with the United States. As Confederate military power lessened after Gettysburg, however, the Yankee Goon vanished from dramatic literature. It does not appear that any Northern dramas deployed President Lincoln as an icon of nationalism. In fact, between 1861 and 1863 New York theaters continued to produce spectacle and extravaganza, burlesque, grand opera, and musical comedy. Not until after Lincoln's assassination does he return as a subject of interest in dramatic literature.

Augustin Daly's *Under the Gaslight* (1867)<sup>42</sup> attends to the post-war significance of class-based expressions of nationalism. Unlike the melodramatic moral reform offered by Aiken's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in which social achievement and respectability are inextricably linked, Daly's sensation melodrama suggests that providence plays a sizeable role in determining and maintaining status. This alteration in characterization and content reflected a broader desire of Northern business-class elites to see intricate representations of "American" life not provided for in moral reform melodrama. Given this, expressions of Americanization changed from definition through "inner qualities of character and morality to 'natural' attributes resulting from birth and upbringing" [McConachie: 215].<sup>43</sup>

Set in New York, the story centers on the upkeep of respectability vis-à-vis a social barometer epitomized by the "fashionable" Mrs. Van Dam. At issue is the vague familial origin of Laura Courtland, who is engaged to respected businessman Ray Trofford. Long rumored to be a beggar's child, Laura is dumped when Ray learns she is indeed a rescued street-urchin. Soon after, Mrs. Van Dam insists that the "best blood in New York is insulted by the girl's presence" [Daly: 167]. Laura flees and resorts to painting and sewing for revenue. Later, the maidservant Peachblossom tells

<sup>40</sup> Hewitt, *King Linkum The First*. This appears to be the only Yankee Goon play specifically written for live performance.

<sup>41</sup> A Southern sympathizing splinter group of the Democratic Party, they preferred to be called "Peace Democrats".

<sup>42</sup> It appears that *Under the Gaslight* introduced the "sensation scene" in which the hero/heroine is tied to the railroad tracks, only to be saved just before the oncoming train arrives.

<sup>43</sup> So successful was *Under the Gaslight* at achieving this that it ran for thirteen weeks in New York, seven weeks in Philadelphia, one month in Boston.

Laura that she and her “cousin” Pearl—to whom Ray is presently engaged—were children “changed in their cradles” by Mrs. Courtland’s nurse Judas as part of a drawn-out blackmail scheme with conspirator Byke [Daly: 184]. The unusually principled Laura vows not to reveal Pearl’s secret so that Ray can avoid further humiliation. In the end Judas dies in an accident, Byke is caught while burglarizing Pearl, and Laura, it seems, will regain economic well-being and social status. The precise plot pattern, misunderstandings, and *peripeteia* for heroine Laura all anticipate representational realism — the favored style of 20<sup>th</sup>-century stage Americanization.

At the *fin de siècle*, American identity is progressively portrayed in terms of geography and economics, accompanied by issues of ethics and morality. Ibsen’s plays in America reinforce the significance of social drama and establish the Well-Made Play as the *tour de force* of play construction; but we see the *Americanization* of European form in spirit and content while the United States theater embodies the Democracy and capitalism that are the hallmarks of American life. James Herne addresses social issues in industrial and rural settings; Clyde Fitch emphasizes the “evils” of city life; and Edward Sheldon examines race relations and the working class. These late 19<sup>th</sup>-century identity formations emerge as fluid, not sedimented, markers of identifiable “American” traits — culminating early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with William Vaughn Moody’s *The Great Divide* (1906), a dramatic expression of the philosophical differences between Puritan New Englanders and frontier peoples.

We leave our discussion of cultural nationalism and dramatic literature here, at the beginning of the vast influx of immigrants whose expectations and encounters greatly influenced the subject matter of dramas to come, as the myth of the Melting Pot works to construct a cohesive national identity. We conclude, then, with a reminder of the prescience of Crèvecoeurian Americanization and its affect on theater in America — at least the region of North America commonly identified as the United States — by pointing to the persistence of an “aesthetic contract” that simultaneously constructs and questions what it means to be “American”. Ultimately, we argue, it is this sustained spirit of inquiry and the presumed right to diversity that defines Americanization on the stage.

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